

RESISTING THE G8 FROM STIRLING ECO-VILLAGE

Members of Wrexham Peace & Justice Forum were among the several thousand activists who made the Stirling Eco Camp their temporary home before and during the G8 Summit in July. Organised by *Dissent!*, "an open, anti-capitalist network of groups and individuals [which] organises horizontally, makes decisions by consensus and is committed to promoting direct action against the G8", the camp was a practical and inspiring demonstration of anti-capitalism, showing that it is possible to live and work together peacefully and sustainably in co-operation rather than competition. All decision-making was by consensus, with views shared in small neighbourhoods or "barrios" fed back into larger, camp-wide action meetings.

It was obvious from the wonderful facilities at the camp that many, many people had been working for months on tasks such as food, transport, toilets, water, recycling, legal support, medical support, and a whole range of other site necessities. Delicious food was prepared at a number of vegan kitchens, run by volunteers, with meals provided for suggested donations covering costs only; no-one went hungry through inability to pay. Fragrant compost toilets, complete with information about how they worked and how the waste would be turned into harmless fertiliser, offered an attractive alternative to the portaloos on site. A fleet of minibuses running on bio-diesel ferried protesters to and from Gleneagles and other destinations. Indymedia organised an internet marquee, with solar and wind powered computers allowing participants to post reports and photos of their actions on the web. Various sustainably powered generators provided amplified music and a PA system.

WHY PROTEST?

The government G8 web site describes what happens at a Summit: "the leaders of the eight member countries discuss major issues of the day. They seek to reach informal agreements on measures... to achieve their goals more effectively."

The *Dissent!* Guide, which was available free at the Eco Camp, summarises the problems with this:

"The G8 is a display of unity between world leaders. They use summits to maintain stability for the world's elite. The G8 has effective control over every instrument of global governance: the IMF, the World Bank, the UN Security Council and NATO. At their annual summit, they claim a monopoly on solutions to global problems. But the problems are not going away. Obsessed with profiteering, consumerism and competition, we know they are not capable of tackling climate change and poverty, at home or abroad. What's actually unfolding is increased military spending, tighter controls on migration, continued environmental destruction, and unprecedented rights for big business.

I would add to this: *and infringements of basic human rights and civil liberties for ordinary people.*"

DIVERSE ACTIONS

People from all over Britain, Europe and the rest of the world used the *Dissent!* Eco Camp as the base for their anti-G8 actions, which were incredibly diverse and too numerous to do justice to here. Many people staying at Stirling took part in large demonstrations elsewhere: the Make Poverty History march in Edinburgh, although the police prevented some from participating; the Make Borders History march through Glasgow where the Metropolitan Police were in evidence, failing in their efforts to destroy the peaceful, carnival atmosphere of the day; the blockade of the Faslane naval base where Trident submarines are housed, which closed the base for the day; the "official" march from Auchterarder to Gleneagles, where protesters breached the supposedly invincible fence around the hotel grounds.



The M9 motorway during the morning rush hour

Small and not so small groups of activists took part in a whole range of autonomous actions which disrupted the first day of the summit: children, babies, clowns and geishas staged blockades, picnics and parties which shut the A9; others shut the M9 motorway at several points or blocked minor roads near Gleneagles, some of them for many hours; activists on the railway line stopped all train services to Gleneagles until late morning; a group of G8 cyclists (but not including the President of the USA who seems to have some difficulty with bicycles) blockaded the whole of the Canadian delegation into their hotel at Dunblane.

POLICING THE G8

Policing of events was mixed and unpredictable; confusion over differences between English and Scottish law did not help as the English police who had been drafted in were unfamiliar with the Scottish legislative framework. Some people reported sensitive and friendly policing, but many others experienced police brutality and commented on violence sparked off by provocative and confrontational policing tactics. 358 protesters were arrested before and during the summit, with some held on remand for as long as six weeks. Over a third have already had all charges against them dropped, but not before vast sums of money have been spent on court costs, legal aid and translation fees, raising questions about the policing of the event and the trivial grounds on which many of the arrests appear to have been made.

HOW THE G8 FAILED TO MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

So, what actually happened at G8 apart from George Bush riding his bike into a policeman yet mysteriously avoiding arrest? It would have been a different story if I'd done that... Did the Make Poverty History campaign achieve its ends? Should we believe the government and the Blairite pop stars or the non-governmental organisations (NGOs)?



Three monkeys: Bono, Bob and Blair

THE OFFICIAL / POP STAR VERDICT

Tony Blair said: *"We do not, simply by this communiqué, make poverty history. But we do show it can be done and we do signify the political will to do it."* In a speech to Parliament, he said: *"On the two hardest issues on the international agenda [Climate Change and Africa], there was progress, in the case of Africa immense progress... Of course the task is now to implement what has been agreed. But assume we can."* He doesn't offer any reasons why we should make that particular assumption.

Bob Geldof's verdict was that *"a great justice has been done ... On aid, 10 out of 10; on debt, 8 out of 10 ... Mission accomplished frankly."* And *"We are beginning to see the lives of the poor of Africa determined not by charity but by justice."* Bono added: *"If an Irish rock star is allowed to quote Winston Churchill, I would not say this is the end of extreme poverty, but it is the beginning of the end."*

WHAT THE NGOs SAID

NGO responses to the G8 agreement contrast starkly with the optimism and glee of Blair, Bob and Bono. George Monbiot reports that *"The World Development Movement described the agreement as 'a disaster for the world's poor'. ActionAid complained that 'the G8 have completely failed to deliver trade justice'. Christian Aid called July 8 'a sad day for poor people in Africa and all over the world'. Oxfam lamented that 'neither the necessary sense of urgency nor the historic potential of Gleneagles was grasped by the G8'."*

Christian Aid News (CAN) for Autumn 2005 observes that although some countries will receive more debt cancellation, this had already been announced by the G7 finance ministers in June and "damaging conditions" will still be imposed on countries before they qualify for debt relief. On trade, CAN notes that there was no progress on introducing flexibility into World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements to allow countries to protect and support their domestic industries. There was a statement from G8 to the effect that poor countries

should be able to choose their own economic policies, and Christian Aid will be pushing for this to be put into practice, although my own view is that the G8 countries have no intention of allowing this to happen. On the much-trumpeted doubling of aid to Africa, CAN points out that old announcements on aid have been included in the figures. Christian Aid will also campaign against conditions being tied to aid packages.

Monbiot cites further shameful facts about the G8 agreement: the extra money for aid and the extra money for debt relief turned out to be the same extra money; 100% debt relief to 18 countries turned out to be debt relief for just 3 years; the rich nations only pledged a small fraction of the money needed in Niger and Mali, leaving millions still at risk of starvation. The list goes on.

G8 POLICIES CREATE POVERTY

We should not be surprised by these failures. The G8 group is unelected and unaccountable, and its policies override decisions made in democratic forums. It has neither constitution nor statement of objectives, but we know it exists to protect and promote the interests of rich countries and big business; these interests will always take precedence over the needs of poor people in other countries (and at home). G8 policies create poverty. G8 leaders are of course keen to portray themselves as champions of the poor, and will lie shamelessly about their intentions and policies to perpetuate this myth, especially when put under pressure by campaigners. We must expose these lies, even if stars like Geldof and Bono don't seem to have noticed them. Rather than calling for reform, rather than demanding that the G8 should pursue more ethical policies, we should be challenging the G8's right to control policy and we should be questioning its right to exist.



Dissent! G8 logo

WEB LINKS

To read more about the many wonderful, creative and imaginative protests, see reports on:

Indymedia www.indymedia.org.uk

Scottish Indymedia <http://scotland.indymedia.org/>

More on background, defendant support etc. on:

Dissent! www.dissent.org.uk

And for the official line:

G8 Presidency web site www.g8.gov.uk